

---

Louisiana WIC

# Sharing Session Guidelines

on

## Mealtime Magic

### Contents:

Guidelines for a Sharing Session on Mealtime Magic	Page 1
Outline for a Sharing Session on Mealtime Magic	Page 3
Background Information on Mealtime Magic	Page 6

---

# Guidelines for a Sharing Session on Mealtime Magic

## ■ **Sharing Session Topic: Mealtime Magic**

## ■ **Sharing Session Audience:**

Parents and caregivers of infants and/or children, at Recertification or Revisit.

The session is appropriate nutrition education for the parents of infants and children with all WIC risk codes.

## ■ **Sharing Session Outline**

These guidelines include one possible outline for a Sharing Session on “Mealtime Magic.” This outline is one of many alternatives for a Sharing Session on this topic. You might decide to do a session that is completely different. You might try different approaches to the topic with different groups, until you find an approach that involves and interests everyone in the group.

## ■ **The topic “Mealtime Magic” lends itself to a Sharing Session because:**

- Most parents are open to practical ideas that could make mealtime easier.
- Most participants in the Sharing Session will have some experience with feeding infants and children and will probably have something to contribute from their experience.

## ■ **Major areas that might be covered in discussion:**

Participants could discuss their experiences and views regarding:

**1. Their most pressing concerns about feeding their children.**

**2. Feeding tips, both from participants and from the “Mealtime Magic” brochures, such as:**

- Praise desirable mealtime behaviors, since this will make children repeat them.
- Make sure children are actually hungry for meals.
- Feed infants in a high chair, if possible, and young children at a table.
- Help children focus on eating. Limit distractions, like TV and toys.
- Get into a daily routine of meals and snacks.
- Make clear mealtime rules and stick with them.

**2. How parents and children can share responsibilities at mealtime.**

**3 . How parents can use mealtime to teach about foods, how to behave at the table, and table manners.**

## ■ **Stimulating discussion using open-ended questions:**

The facilitator can stimulate group discussion on “Mealtime Magic” using open-ended questions.

Some examples of open-ended questions are:

- What is the hardest part of mealtime for you?
- Let’s share ideas from your experience on how parents can deal with (concern x) at mealtime. Who has dealt with this themselves?

- Think of some mealtime behavior you would you like to see more often from your child. What could you say to praise your child for that behavior next time you see it? Would you be willing to try this?
- What rules do you have at mealtime? What mealtime rule would you like to stick with more consistently?
- Were you made to eat when you were a child? How did that feel, do you remember? Have you been taught that it's your job to make your child eat?
- What do you think about not trying to make your child eat, but focusing instead on teaching your child and enjoying your child at mealtime?
- What are the different things that children learn at mealtime? (About new foods, eating skills, how to behave at meals, about new foods, about how adults act at mealtime, etc.)

## ■ **Resources:**

- A supply of Mealtime Magic with your 6 to 12 month old (CN-8) Mealtime Magic with your 1 or 2 year old, (CN-9) and Mealtime Magic with your 3 or 4 year old (CN-10) brochures will provide participants with ideas and information appropriate to their infant's or child's age. The USDA flip chart "Fit Kids, Happy Kids" can also be used.

## ■ **Other Materials:**

- Pencils or pens (one for each participant, collect at end of session)
- Evaluation Forms, "What did you think of today's Sharing Session?"
- Optional: basket or box of a variety of toys and books for children to play with while their caregivers participate in the Sharing Session

# Outline for a Sharing Session on Mealtime Magic

## ■ Welcome

- Introduce yourself, state the topic, “Mealtime Magic,” and how long the session will take.
- Warmly invite participants to let their kids play with the toys and books you have provided.
- Cover the “Ground Rules” briefly.
- State your role (helping the discussion go smoothly) and the participants’ role (sharing their ideas, concerns, knowledge and experiences about creating Mealtime Magic).

## ■ Icebreaker:

“First I’d like to ask you imagine you have a fairy godmother! If she said you could have one wish granted about how your child eats or acts at mealtime, what would you most like to change? (Pause.) Now let’s go around and tell our names and the thing you would ask for from your fairy godmother. As I said, I’m \_\_\_(your first name)\_\_\_ and I would like my fairy godmother to (make my kids like eating everything I put on the table.)”

Make a list of the wishes. Group similar wishes together, if possible. The purpose of the list is to guide the discussion that follows, so that you are addressing the most common concerns.

## ■ Discussion

Here are possible questions to encourage discussion, unless participants carry the discussion in another direction. Go with the participant’s interests and concerns!

- **Ooops, we are all out of fairy godmothers today!** But let’s share what we know from our own experiences and see if we can help each other come up with some Mealtime Magic of our own! Many of you have already dealt with these concerns we have heard because they are typical and even predictable at certain ages. Let’s share ideas from your experience on how parents can deal with (concern x from the list) at mealtime. Who has dealt with this themselves? (Choose an example from the list that seems common and that participants would have experience with.) (After discussion, go through other concerns on the list or select several topics on the list. Keep the discussion moving rapidly for several minutes. If the group is not participating much, ask individuals who seem the most interested what they would suggest to the mom who has concern x. Avoid lecturing on each concern yourself! Let the group get comfortable with speaking and offering ideas. Make it fun. Work in the “fairy godmother” theme if you want to, saying, “If you were her fairy godmother, what would you suggest?”)
- **Let’s turn to these Mealtime Magic brochures.** (Let them look at the brochures for a minute.) Here is an interesting tip (third tip on both Ages 1 and 2 and Ages 3 and 4 brochures):
  - “Praise positive mealtime behaviors, since this will make children repeat them.”

If you get praise for doing something well, doesn’t it make you feel good? Think of some mealtime behavior you would like to see more often from your child. What could you say to praise your child for that behavior, so that your child would feel good about doing it more often? Would you be willing to try this? (Select a behavior from the list made earlier, if needed, and come up with praise to increase a desired behavior.)

- “Make sure children are actually hungry for meals.”  
Lots of times kids just aren’t hungry at mealtime. How could you help make sure they *are* hungry?
- “Feed infants in a high chair, if possible, and young children at a table.”  
Why?
- “Help children focus on eating. Limit distractions, like TV and toys.”  
What is one thing that YOU can do to limit distractions at mealtime?
- “Get into a daily routine of meals and snacks.”  
This can really help YOU, especially if your child is constantly asking you for food.  
Who has their child on a daily routine of meals and snacks? How does that work for you?
- Make clear mealtime rules and stick with them.  
What rules do you have at mealtime?  
How can you stick with your rules more consistently?
- **Now let’s talk about whether or not it’s your job to make your child eat.**
  - The brochure says it’s not YOUR job to make your child eat. It says that when you stop trying to MAKE your child eat, your child eats better. Were YOU made to eat when you were a child? How did that feel, do you remember? Have you been taught that it’s your job to make your child eat?
  - What do you think about not trying to make your child eat, but focusing instead on teaching your child about foods and enjoying your child at mealtime?
- **Learning at mealtime.**
  - Who is your child’s best teacher? You, of course! You deserve a lot of credit for that. Your child learns from you every single day. You are your child’s role model. Your child is noticing and trying to copy nearly everything you do. Scary, isn’t it?!
  - What are the different things that children learn at mealtime? (About new foods, eating skills, how to behave at meals, about new foods, about how adults act at mealtime, etc.)

## ■ **Goal setting:**

- “As a result of today’s discussion, what one thing could YOU do to make mealtimes easier and more pleasant with your child?” (Look over the “Mealtime Magic” brochure if you’d like and write at least one thing on the back that you would like to try.) (Or offer the group some of the things that have been covered, like praising desirable behaviors, taking pressure off a child about how much to eat, or being more consistent with mealtime rules.)
- “Would anyone like to share what she wrote?” (Thank everyone who offers up something and say “That’s great!” or “Good idea!” to each one.)

## ■ **Closing:**

Summarize the discussion, if there is time. For instance you could say, “I said at the beginning that we were all out of fairy godmothers today but I was wrong! We had lots of fairy godmothers! I loved the way you shared your ideas with each other about how to deal with kids at mealtime and make some mealtime magic. I think we realized today that it’s easy to get into fights with kids about food --but it’s not really necessary. Fighting with kids to make them eat does not make them eat any

better and it just drives you crazy. But there are a lot of things you can do to help kids eat better, and you brought up a lot of them today. Your ideas were great about dealing with x, x and x. (Refer to your first list, if needed.)

End with, "Thank you for coming and for sharing so much with each other! I really enjoyed being with you today and talking about these things! Remember Mealtimes Magic at your next meal! By the way, stick with what you do for a few weeks before you decide if it is working or not. It takes a while for everybody, both you and your child, to adjust to new habits.

Thanks again for sharing, and please take a minute to fill out the evaluation form.

# Background Information for a Sharing Session on Mealtime Magic

The following information provides a short review for the group leader on “Mealtime Magic” concepts. The material, on pages 6-8, is excerpted from the the manual called “Creating Mealtime Magic,” which is a Louisiana WIC Program publication. The manual uses *Bright Futures in Practice: Nutrition, Second Edition, 2002* <sup>1</sup> as its basis.

Here are three of the chapter reviews in that manual.

## Infancy

What do parents need to do to make mealtimes go well in the first year of life? They need to learn their baby’s signals that say “I’m hungry” and “I’m full.” They need to feed the infant when the infant is hungry, and feed until the infant seems full. They need to trust the infant to know how much is enough.

Parents also need to provide a pleasant eating environment. This is very important. The bonding that takes place at mealtime is vital for both the parent and the infant. A sense of caring and trust evolves and lays the groundwork for emotional health throughout life.

The young infant’s main developmental “job” is to become secure and bonded (attached) with the parent. To make sure this happens, the parent should hold the infant close when breastfeeding or bottle feeding, maintain eye contact, and talk gently with the infant.

In middle infancy (6 to 9 months) and late infancy (9 to 12 months), the infant’s main developmental “job” is to explore. At mealtimes, parents should be patient and understanding as the infant tries new foods and learns to feed herself with her fingers. Parents should help the infant drink from a cup, in preparation for weaning. Parents should remove distractions so that the infant stays focused on the food. If the infant does not like a new food, she should not be forced to eat it. The food can be offered at a later time.

By late infancy (9 to 12 months), an infant is usually on the same eating schedule as the family—breakfast, lunch and dinner. If the infant is bottle fed, weaning to the cup starts to take place during this time. As breastfeeding or bottle feeding decline, the infant will need snacks between meals—in mid-morning, in the afternoon, and at bedtime. A high chair helps the infant be a part of the family circle at mealtime. Being a part of family meals helps the infant form close relationships, learn new skills by watching others, and learn about foods.

## Ages 1 and 2

Toddlers, at age 1 and 2, are very busy little people, determined to do things their own way. Their main “job” developmentally is to prove to themselves and their parents “I am a separate person from you!” This can present many challenges to parents at mealtimes. However, toddlers do become easier to feed at ages 3 and 4.

Toddlers don't eat much and they don't eat according to the Food Guide Pyramid. This often makes parents panic and feel they are not doing their job well. Parents need reassurance that most toddler eating "problems" are actually predictable. Toddlers grow more slowly than they did as infants and their appetites reflect this. The best indicator of an adequate diet is the toddler's growth, not how much the child eats.

**Toddlers typically:**

- become picky eaters
- refuse to eat certain foods
- sometimes refuse to eat at all
- eat only one or two foods at a meal

Parents do not need to take this personally or think that it reflects on their parenting skills. They need to stay as calm and as relaxed as possible, include the toddler in family meals, not force the child to eat, and continue to offer the whole family a variety of healthy foods—even if the toddler won't eat many of them.

A nutrition educator can help parents know what behaviors to expect from toddlers and can help parents create pleasant mealtimes.

**"Mealtime Magic" happens when...**

- parents know what behaviors to expect
- parents and children share responsibilities at mealtime
- parents make eating easy
- parents make mealtime pleasant
- parents are good role models

There are fewer mealtime battles if parents observe a division of responsibility around eating.<sup>2</sup> Parents are responsible for *what*, *when*, and *where* the child eats. Children are responsible for deciding *whether to eat* and *how much* to eat.



Feeding a 3 or 4 year old is not nearly as challenging as feeding a toddler, but it's still not easy, because children this age:

- are often picky
- go on food jags occasionally
- have very strong likes and dislikes
- like to talk more than they want to eat
- continue to challenge their parents

However, children this age are now more grown up about eating. They can feed themselves, they will usually try more foods, and they have a greater interest in food in general.



Like toddlers, 3 and 4 year olds learn constantly. They model much of their behavior and beliefs around what they observe their family members do, eat, and say. Many lifelong attitudes and food habits are being established during this period.

It's important for parents to continue to observe a division of responsibility around eating.<sup>2</sup> Parents are responsible for *what*, *when*, and *where* the child eats. Children are responsible for deciding *whether to eat* and *how much* to eat. This means parents should provide regular meals and snacks, offering a variety of healthy foods. It is the child's responsibility to actually eat them and to decide how much to eat. Children do not eat well if they are forced to eat foods they don't like.

Pleasant mealtimes mean a lot to children this age. Mealtimes give them a chance to show off their new skills at eating, talking, and socializing.

Parents should be careful *not* to use foods to reward, bribe, or punish children, or to calm, comfort, or entertain their children. Misusing food in these ways can distort the child's relationship to food.

To help a child develop a good body image a parent should not criticize their own size or shape or anyone else's, especially the child's.

The overall goal of feeding children is for them to be well nourished and have a positive relationship to food and eating. This can help create a lifelong foundation for health.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Story M, Holt K, Sofka D, eds. 2002. *Bright Futures in Practice: Nutrition* (2nd ed.) Arlington, Va: National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health and Georgetown University, used with permission. Document is available in its entirety at <<[www.brightfutures.org](http://www.brightfutures.org)>> Copies available from NMCHC web site: <<[www.nmchc.org](http://www.nmchc.org)>>

2. Satter EM. 1998. *Secrets of Raising a Healthy Eater*. Chelsea, MI: Kelcy Press.